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# WOMAN AND HER SPHERE.

BY THE DUCHESS OF SUTHERLAND.

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"I have been ready to believe that we have even now a new revelation, and the name of its Messiah is Woman."—Oliver Wendell Holmes.

WERE it not for the never silent voices of the past, one might be tempted to imagine that, in common with the Röntgen rays, wireless telegraphy and the Maxim gun, the last decade of the nineteenth century bore the honor of the invention of woman.

Certain it is that round the magic name a mighty whirlwind of argument and pother has arisen. Through the dust of controversy one needs a clear eye to recognize that no petticoated species has suddenly been evolved. Womanhood has worn its halo and carried its stripes throughout the ages; what the poet has glorified, and man—prosaic man—has kissed or kicked, according to circumstances, is in no way metamorphosed. Clad in her robe of contradictions, woman was yesterday the pride or sorrow of our race; she remains the same to-day. The eternal feminine is the eternal feminine still.

Yet, at the dawn of a new century, we cannot be satisfied with these generalizations. To make good our claims in the present, we turn instinctively to the great women among the dead; for often a truer sense of proportion is attained by regarding the reflection of an object rather than the object itself. We grip strongly in our minds the thing that has happened; the thing that is happening may remain elusive.

They stand out singly in their power, those women of yesterday. Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Fanny Kemble, George Sand and George Eliot, Madame de Staël, Mrs. Barrett Browning, Madame de Sévigné and Madame le Brun, Hannah More, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Fry, Rosa Bonheur; in heterogeneous medley the names come tumbling

through my mind. In their several ways all have sat serenely on the lap of Fame. "*Place aux dames*" without a murmur—and with ungrudging eulogy history has acknowledged the justice of the position.

We must, however, discriminate, and note the gulf of characteristics, of years, of countries, that stretches between these names; that has allowed the personality of each to be brought to such exquisite moulding. Undoubtedly, the tendency of the successive epochs with which I am dallying was altogether individualistic. Yet as we draw our minds to the present, we know that all genius unconsciously adapts its manifestation to the need of the race in its particular stage of development. History repeats itself, even if it repeats itself disguised, as it moves events, by the temper of the age. Joan of Arc and Elizabeth Fry are linked closer than the superficial observer might allow. The intelligence of Queen Elizabeth finds its civilized counterpart in our generation.

Society, while fundamentally unchanged, exhibits to-day a different state of affairs to that prevalent in the past. In the minds of men the historic element has declined, to make way for the growth of the modern element of science. Happily, or unhappily, according to opinion, science demands fresh methods of administration. It draws the ever-growing population of the world under its sway, and accomplishes movements and advances, not man by man, but by groups, by parties, by amalgamations. The very nature of our industries, of our trade combinations, of the inclination to congregate in cities—a foremost impulse with the people of the country—proves this. For the individual there can be no leisurely walking to pre-eminence; those who can must crush to the front.

Paradoxical as it may appear, it is to the tune of liberty that the world has been hurried to this fresh captivity. For, undoubtedly, we are in captivity to systems, in spite of the assurance that systems are but the framework of the eternal and ever-expanding idea. Systems, however, especially in their relation to economic and social conditions, have advantages; they cannot allow any portion of life to escape valuation or to evade its use.

We have already seen that a woman here and there in other centuries towered without emulation above the herd of her sex. Now, in its numbers, the whole sex, no longer singing of resigna-

tion behind barred gates, has, through this rearrangement of the world's affairs, been called out for inspection, for inquiry.

The scientific spirit drills humanity by battalions, and judges results in the gross, but demands definition, analysis, precision in terms. As in our museums it labels specimens, in our dictionaries it classifies words, so for the human atom it can accept no general statements. Why are these women, it asks, and for what?

Surely, comes the immediate answer, for motherhood—the power which none can gainsay—motherhood of prophets and kings, motherhood of men. As mother, woman rocks the cradle of all civilization, she sets the commencement of all histories. Like a star upon her brow, she carries the notable moment of the beginning.

Science, however, passes beyond the passionate sentiment of this truth.

“Man is an organism,” it says; “woman, in more refined and subtle form, is an organism likewise. Both, from natural instinct, take their share in the reproduction of the race. But, for mental growth, are woman's chances equal to man's chances? Is her position in harmony with the ideal social state? If not, give her the chances and the position; for to create harmony, to establish a scheme of justice, slowly, but for certain, is my mission.”

And from this command emancipation for the sex has come—emancipation, sudden, perhaps, but inseparable from the law of evolution, and in league with progress, consequently in league with the welfare of society of which the “organic unity is a cardinal principle.”

Just for a little we stand now dizzy with our own importance, uncertain, or too certain, of ourselves.

As we look out at the possibilities that have been accorded us for making headway toward the perfection of the future, there is reason to feel apprehension at the scramble of some venturesome female souls on the ladder of intellectual and political ascent. Adorned as these are by shapeless shirt-waists, indifferent to clearness of complexion and pearly teeth, such apprehensions do not arise from dread of a fell encounter with the tyranny of man; giggling golden-locks below is in full possession of all ammunition for such warfare. But the reflex action of their impetuous conduct upon their own lives is to be dreaded; for conduct does much to determine character, and character is essential to a woman if

she is to be the builder of great things. What we are, not what we do, leaves the graven letters upon the stone.

Seriously, in considering the relative position of men and women in public life, one cannot cast reflection upon the enlightened man's attitude toward the enlightened woman. It is a shock for him, undoubtedly, when a few years ago, as we reckon time, she had no status in his calculations beyond the pleasing attraction of a plaything, to find now at his side a host of women claiming in calm determination equality of brain and muscle and opportunity with himself. But he has borne the shock well, and it is probable that he is perfectly ready to offer to the women who convince his reason of the value of their work a willing co-operation.

Now that we may speak our mind, let us declare that a world of men can no more be imagined than a world of women; for after all there is so little difference in their relative importance to the community. The combination of their varied faculties is the only condition within the range of fancy. The childish squabble, "You can't have this and I will have that," between the unreasonable representatives of the sexes, is puerile in the extreme.

There is an old story,\* the Japanese myth of creation, of how Izananni and Izanigi, the Adam and Eve of the Land of the Rising Sun, stood upon the floating bridge of heaven, the rainbow. Izananni brought up from the bottom of the sea, with his coral pointed spear, the material of which he formed the first dry land. Descending with his consort Izanigi, they set out right and left to make the tour of the island. They met, and the goddess, speaking first, cried: "How delightful to encounter a beauteous male!" But at this Izananni took offence, for he thought it unbecoming that the female should speak first; so they made the circuit a second time, and when they met again Izananni said, before Izanigi could speak: "How pleasant, indeed, to meet a lovely woman!" Thus both were satisfied. Somewhat in the same infantile spirit, if not in the same civil manner, is the war between the extremes of both sexes conducted at the present day.

But in truth, in a matter of so much moment, the extremes may not be considered. To teach the imperfect sex to say "we," as the little organ blower taught the organist to say it when each learnt that neither could make music without the other, is, to my

\* "Sunrise Stories"

mind, woman's greatest mission. To ridicule passion or to despise the lover is unnatural and absurd; but to establish a true comradeship between the sexes is the highest purpose of life; yet is development so slow that only a portion of mankind and of womankind have learnt this secret of existence.

On a summer afternoon, from the breezy hill-side above a bay in the Western Highlands, is to be seen, meandering among the brown rocks, the strong silvery current of a river running to the sea. Presently, the tide rises to meet the river; and in time rocks and sand have disappeared under one sheet of water, whether salt or fresh one cannot tell. Its waves break with equal strength along the coast. To me such a scene is allegorical of the forces of life. The waters mingle, as the forces wielded by the hands and the hearts of men and women are united in one effort after one object.

Women are not meant to be fanatics, but rather to make fanatics of men. The sight of a mob or army of men who, thrilled by sudden emotion, sweep on to some goal, be it good or bad, brings to the onlooker a flush upon the cheek, a quickened throb to the pulse. A mass of women moved to enthusiasm or frenzy by the same circumstances awake no feeling but regret. Without her frame or environment, woman, as the unset diamond, fails to impress. She needs to be appraised sitting by her writing-table—holding, even as she talks, the book that she reads, the children of her home perhaps clinging to her knee.

To turn to the practical from the sentimental side of the matter, we realize that women are at present somewhat retarding things, for themselves and all the world, by a lack of discipline. Released from petty restraint, they occasionally overlook the fact that they must govern themselves. This is especially necessary for the woman with the largest sphere of influence, with the best administrative capacity. Before such an one knows it, great responsibilities slip into her hands. Tacitly, she is given the shaping of characters, the guiding of careers. To a few women this fact is ennobling beyond measure; to others it brings a sudden intoxication which is gravely unbalancing.

Man is by nature a philosopher; woman becomes one only by education. She forgets too often that to be ready to obey is a mark of strength; and she shipwrecks herself, in a sudden sense of superiority, on trifles and side issues. She has yet to learn that

it is best to beware of "glorie or fame," which Montaigne calls that "vain image and idly simple voice which hath neither body nor hold-fast," best to refrain from battering against barred doors. Barred doors will be barred no longer when she has swept and garnished the many empty rooms leading to their approach, and which cry to her, as she rushes by, to make them in their emptiness habitable.

It is difficult, I know, to allocate to all ambitious women in public life their proper sphere. In fairness it must be granted that a woman, in spite of her avowed liberty, starts life under a disadvantage. She is harassed by trifles and conventionalities which a man escapes. There are certain expectations of a woman which hold without much reason to the general conception of her nature. She should be at the beck and call of all who have need—wide-eyed with sympathy and without complaint. She dare not beg the leisure a man commands, and is accorded solitude grudgingly, her very security of self becoming insecure.

It is, however, imperative that women should recognize this age as essentially one of preparation for the sex, rather than achievement. The natural powers of the average female mind are certainly equal, if not superior, to the average man's. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his belief that there is something more substantive about a woman than ever there can be about a man. But so long a start have men obtained in freedom, and in consequent development, that opinion yields them a false superiority. Woman, like a butterfly emerging from the chrysalis, has wings at last, and latent strength to enable her to fly at will, but for a period she must wait for fuller growth. In this waiting, she comes to the possession of her own soul and finds, as Carlyle puts it, "by study of herself the ground she stands on, what her combined inward and outward capability specially is."

Above all education is needed self-knowledge. Self-knowledge will reveal "the spirit of the race, the almighty will of life." It will give calmness to look round, and temper strong persuasions with a weakness for weakness, and leisure to cultivate that saving grace, a sense of humor. Cultivate, did I say? The gift of the gods comes not by cultivation; still, what a glorious addition to the sum of life will be the emancipated woman with a sense of humor!

It is, perhaps, hard for us to be patient; to know that not to

us, but to our children, and to our children's children will come attainment, that *we*, mentally and physically, must train ourselves that *they* may have the full and perfect life. With few exceptions we have no heritage of superlative health or nervous energy to uphold us. Our mothers belonged wholly to the *ancien régime*, and we must see to it that we strengthen, not squander, the faint physical forces which they supplied us with, for the body must support bravely the vigor of the mind.

Still, to be able to foresee, to know that the best and highest must ultimately be bequeathed by us to the coming woman, that in itself brings courage.

Courage is no mean quality to desire when we gaze at the multitude of women streaming, unchecked at last, through the open gates of opportunity. The wise ones walk with wary footsteps, ready in faith and humility to take up the allotted task; the shrieking band of ignoramuses, exorbitant in demands and unfit in capacity, tear past; and around and behind them everywhere the multitude of haggard, anxious women of our industrial classes sweep into the toil and turmoil of offices and factories. These accept in payment the pittance called wages, and evade inspection and advice from sheer terror of having an hour's labor curtailed or losing in any manner a weekly sixpence.

The serious part of the whole question is, that for many working women in the middle and lower classes emancipation is still so spurious an affair. They have freedom to work, that is about all; and the evils attendant upon over-pressure dog their every footstep. The middle-class women who hold important public posts as clerks, telegraphists, teachers, etc., have the hardest task. They know and understand, and yet they have neither time nor health to act upon their convictions. They may ride a bicycle if they can afford to hire one, but they can count on no support if they ask for higher salaries and shorter hours. Their freedom still resolves itself into authorized slavery. For the lower-class woman, matters are different, but no better. The working man in the same position reads, thinks, debates—he sees the possibility of becoming a man of mark. But the woman beside him is still rudderless; her untrained mind cannot grasp the meaning of the companionship he needs, her intellectual status is still appallingly low. One is haunted by the fear that, till women in the upper strata of society are united in letting their best influence filter



through to the strata of varying grades below them, there is little gain for the sex as a whole. As things are at present, the aspect of our manufacturing cities, with their women's and child's labor, is no pleasing one.

Good it is that we can look beyond. The battle strews the field with dead, but the ultimate victory is not jeopardized. We, who tramp shivering at our experiences along the road of progress, know that at every step we march nearer the light. Through all these thoughts runs the fire of a larger hope, that upon our acknowledged virtues we may learn to graft the greater virtues; not, indeed, stolen from men, but absorbed from Him who has stamped all humanity with His likeness; the Silent Power controlling the spirit of every age, Who waits, even as we cry for immediate satisfaction, for grand fulfilment in the hereafter.

God is just, we say—science craves for justice—justice, that noble preceptor of love. When women emerging from prejudices come to the understanding of justice, then at last and for ever will be established the universal motherhood, the universal sisterhood, bearing for the women who toil in the valleys and for those who tread the mountains the same watchword—a watchword that, in glorious rhythm, will silence the yapping of industrial and class strife.

So moves the world, illuminating, as it becomes diviner, its own problems, divulging its own secrets, till at last on the great tree of life no branches may be stunted, no leaves withered, no flowers decayed.

MILLCENT SUTHERLAND.